

to help find a good botanical description, with correct scientific nomenclature. *Botanical descriptions* are thorough, as is information on *distribution* and *habitat*. Of course the real importance of a work like this is best revealed under the subheading *medicinal properties and uses*. Here, one can find information on the part of the plant used in preparation of a traditional drug, historical information on which cultural groups used the plant, and the chemically active components, if they are identified. Each description also has a short list of *references*.

An extensive 186 pages of end matter follows the descriptions. A *Bibliography* is followed by a *Glossary of Medical Terms* and a *Glossary of Botanical Terms*. A very well done and complete *Common Name Index* comes next, separated into the languages of the region. Also included are a *Scientific Name Index* and an *Index of Medicinal Uses*.

This is certainly one of the most extensive and well-designed medicinal plant books to date. Hopefully its vast information and intuitive organization will set a standard for other regional medicinal plant books. This volume should help awaken readers to the vast unexplored areas of study in medicinal plants. Many of the species described in this work have not been studied scientifically, and could be of great pharmaceutical value. Finally, this book makes one fully aware of the importance of conserving all biologically diverse areas, especially those containing useful and potentially revolutionary healing plants.—*Cole Weatherby, Dept. of Biology, Austin College, Sherman, TX 75090, and Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, TX 76102, U.S.A., wweatherby@austinc.edu*

STEPHEN FOSTER and CHRISTOPHER HOBBS. 2002. **Peterson Field Guide to Western Medicinal Plants and Herbs.** (ISBN 0-395-83806-1, Flexi, ISBN 0-395-83807-X, hbk.). Houghton Mifflin Company, 222 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 02116-3764, U.S.A. (Orders: 617-351-3243, gracie_doyle@hmco.com, www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com). \$22.00 (Flexi), \$30.00 (hbk). 448 pp, 530 + color photos, 4 1/2" × 7 1/4".

This Peterson field guide to medicinal plants is the second by author Stephen Foster. The *Peterson Field Guide to Medicinal Plants and Herbs of Eastern and Central North America*, released in 2000, marked a sort of revolution in plant field guides. Not only did this guide allow for the identification of many plant species, using the "Peterson System", but it also provided important information on both contemporary and historical medicinal uses and toxicity. Having used field guides extensively, I have often found myself wanting more information than the descriptions had to offer. This usually meant a trip home to look the species up in my local flora and, often, another trip to the library to search for articles in the scientific literature. While I usually enjoy doing this kind of detective work, I found it fascinating to have more information available right there in the field, with the plant staring me in the face.

Initially this durably bound and covered book resembles any other field-worthy guide. I was a bit surprised to find thick glossy pages, each usually presenting at least one color photograph. This book places photographs immediately adjacent to the individual species descriptions, as other Peterson guides have done. This is a very nice feature, as it can often be frustrating flipping back and forth between descriptions and photographs. The identification system is decent. As in most Peterson botanical field guides, the species are separated into six flower color sections, followed by shrubs, trees, woody vines, ferns and fern allies, and grasses and grass-like plants. In the color-separated sections, things are also grouped by various key flower characteristics. This system requires one to thumb through practically every page until they find the section they are looking for. A table of contents at the beginning of each flower color section showing the sub-sections would be very useful, and speed

up identification. I'm sure that my copy will soon be cluttered with self-adhesive notes sticking out of my favorite sections, so this problem is fixable with a little work.

The biggest surprise came when I started reading the excellent descriptions this book offers. Each species has a short botanical description, followed by range, uses, and related species and warnings when applicable. The "uses" section is, of course, the most significant thing this book has to offer. This usually presents information on how the plant was used historically, and how the plant was and is prepared. It is interesting to see so much preparation information. Although it states plainly in the introduction that this "...book is not intended to be prescriptive or to take the place of a healthcare provider...", there is certainly enough information here on preparation and indications for use to allow one to actually use these plants. Co-author Christopher Hobbs is a licensed acupuncturist, herbalist, and consultant to the dietary supplement industry whose expertise on preparing these plants for actual use is apparent upon reading these sections. Dosage information is rarely listed in the *Uses* section, which seems potentially hazardous. This work provides readers with the necessary information to make use of these plants by containing detailed preparation instructions, and then neglects to give any dosage information, not even warnings about over-dose. It is likely that it would have been difficult to compile this information, and liability issues may have also prevented the inclusion of dosages. It would also be helpful to provide references for the specific historical information presented in the text. However, there is a nice list of references in the back, which seems to compensate for this.

Icons are used throughout this book to indicate poisonous plants, plants that are known to cause allergic reactions or contact dermatitis, and those used in modern medicine. The end matter includes a checklist of plant species, with blanks to write observed flowering or fruiting dates, and two indices: an index of plant species by common and scientific name, and another of medicinal topics. The medicinal topics index is excellent, providing page numbers of plant descriptions organized by their usefulness in treating specific medical conditions.

This guide is an incomparable field companion for anyone with an interest in medicinal plants. The extensive color photographs are good to spectacular, and it is obvious that great amounts of time were invested in finding some of the best photographs available. The book's identification material, detailed information on plant uses, and brilliant color photographs make it especially deserving of a spot in your backpack.—*Cole Weatherby, Dept. of Biology, Austin College, Sherman, TX 75090, and Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, TX 76102, U.S.A., wweatherby@austinc.edu*